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Announcing The Year of Proof as Theme Year 2012-2013

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How do we know that what we know is true? How can we be certain of something? If absolute certainty isn't possible, how close can we come? When do we know we've proved something?

The search for proof is fundamental, a core mission shared among virtually all areas of inquiry. And though the approaches and standards for proof differ among disciplines, they share a similar process, involving experimentation, research, gathering evidence, applying general knowledge and common sense... and ultimately, some degree of faith.

In 2012-2013, the Year of Proof will be an opportunity for Penn's schools and academic centers to consider how proof is established. We will explore topics ranging from medical diagnoses, to the verification of authorship, to questions of historical performance practice (how do we know what Beethoven really meant by "allegro"?). We will consider areas where proof may be absolute, as well as the more ambiguous definition of proof in legal and political discourse. A sampling of additional topics is listed below, and we encourage creative programming in these and many other areas.

- *History*: How do we sort through multiple narratives and differing points of view to make judgments about past events?
- *Mathematics*: The "Q. E. D." sign-off is offered as the ultimate solution.
- *Business*: How do we determine the value of a product or service? What tools do we use?
- *Literature*: Does literary analysis involve "proving" a thesis? What are the standards for making judgments about a literary work's value and meaning?
- *Engineering*: How do we know something is going to work? (That a bridge will stand, that a pacemaker won't fail, that a computer program is glitch-free?)
- *Religion*: What is the relation between proof and faith?
- *Epistemology/Philosophy*: How do we know what we know?
- *Law*: Evidence and proof are at the core of the law—but how are certain forms of evidence judged stronger than others? How reliable are eyewitnesses? Why do courts not allow hearsay? Why is circumstantial evidence often dismissed? Why did we replace "trial by ordeal" with "trial by jury"?
- *Sciences*: What constitutes scientific evidence and proof? What is the role of experimentation in achieving certainty and/or consensus? How do we establish standards of scientific proof?

Year of Proof Grants Program

To further the goals of the Theme Year, the Provost's office will sponsor a Year of Proof Grants Program that will support opportunities for programs and research. The Grants Committee will evaluate applications based on the quality and innovation of the project and its potential to engage and involve the Penn community. We encourage multi-disciplinary and/or collaborative projects between Penn organizations and schools. Project leaders are encouraged to reach out to other schools and departments, especially to share expertise, networking opportunities, and invitation lists.

On-line proposals will be accepted for grants of up to \$750, for which Penn faculty, students and staff can apply, either individually or in groups. There will be some additional funding at a higher level available for special projects—generally, larger conferences, speakers or special symposia that are co-sponsored by several Penn Schools or Centers. Examples from the Year of Games are a talk by Will Shortz, the crossword puzzle editor of *The New York Times*, and an internationally-celebrated enigmatologist; also a day-long program at the Penn Museum on games in the ancient world.

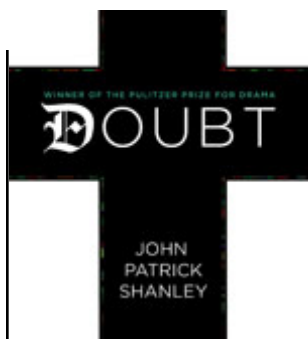
Beginning February 1, Year of Proof Grant guidelines and application form will be available on-line at www.themeyeargrants.org. Submitted proposals will be reviewed in cycles beginning April 1, 2012.

For more information: Please contact David Fox, director of New Student Orientation and Academic Initiatives, at dfox@upenn.edu, or (215) 573-5636.

John Patrick Shanley's *Doubt*: Penn Reading Project Book for Year of Proof 2012-2013



The Provost, the Council of Undergraduate Deans, and the Office of New Student Orientation and Academic Initiatives are pleased to announce that John Patrick Shanley's play *Doubt* will be the text for the 2012-13 Penn Reading Project (PRP). On the afternoon of Sunday, September 2, 2012, groups of first-year students and faculty leaders will join together to discuss the book as part of New Student Orientation for the Class of 2015.



John Patrick Shanley's play, winner of the 2005 Pulitzer Prize for drama, deals with the conflict between a popular young parish priest teaching in a high school, and the school's principal, a nun who believes the priest to be guilty of misconduct though she has little evidence to support this. *The New York Times* praised *Doubt* as "written with an uncanny blend of compassion and detachment... presents each point of view with reasonableness and an eloquence... Even as *Doubt* holds your conscious attention as an intelligently measured debate play, it sends off stealth charges that go deeper emotionally." The play, raising provocative questions about faith, evidence and instinct, will serve as an ideal kick-off for the Year of Proof.

PRP, now entering its 22nd year, was created as an introduction for incoming freshmen to academic life at Penn. Past Penn Reading Projects have included Jane McGonigal's *Reality is Broken*, Rose George's *The Big Necessity*, Neil Shubin's *Your Inner Fish*, Michael Pollan's *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, Lawrence Lessig's *Free Culture*, Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography*, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, and Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia*—as well as Thomas Eakin's painting, *The Gross Clinic*. Information about the Penn Reading Project and its history can be found at: www.yearofproof.org

Faculty members in all 12 schools are invited to take part as PRP discussion leaders. A copy of the text will be sent to discussion leaders and students in July, along with additional information about the Reading Project. If you wish to sign up, you may go directly to the database: www.rescomp.upenn.edu/prpleaders (If you registered last year, you can simply update your information, and also indicate if you'll participate in this year's prep session and lectures.)

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